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Oral Poetry and the Printing Press in Byron's *The Giaour* (1813)

The Giaour: A Fragment of A Turkish Tale is an early example of Byron's fascination with the orient. Issued in 1813, it was an instant success, passing through fourteen editions in three years. Readers devoured the story of Leila, a fugitive Circassian slave, who was drowned by her master Hassan and avenged by her Venetian lover, the mysterious Giaour. In this, the first of his Eastern tales, Byron postures as an editor and translator of oral poetry in the worthy tradition of Fortis, Herder, Goethe, and the less reputable Macpherson. Byron claims he heard the story 'recited by one of the coffee-house story-tellers who abound in the Levant, and sing or recite their narratives'.¹ This 'snake of a poem', as he lovingly called his piece, was 'lengthening its rattles every month': from the compact first 1813 version in 344 lines, the story grew to 1334 lines in the seventh and last edition Byron supervised himself.² Drawing on a multiplicity of sources, including local songs, learned literature, and autobiographical moments, Byron delivered a virtuoso performance, producing several versions of the tale in rapid succession.³ The present study investigates Byron as editor and narrator of oral poetry – the form *The Giaour* so mischievously imitates – and concludes with the analysis of one particular passage of his tale.

ORAL POETRY AND THE PRINTED BOOK

With wicked imprecision, the editor-translator Byron calls his tale a 'Romaic' or 'Arnaut ditty'.⁴ These terms contradict each other, as 'Arnaut' can mean 'Albanian' or 'Muslim', while 'Romaic' means 'modern Greek', but also 'Greek Orthodox' or 'non-Muslim'; the Greeks referred to themselves as *Romaioi*, remembering their status as Greek Orthodox members of the (formerly Roman) Empire.⁵ The Greek liberation movement of the nineteenth century sought to forge a historical and cultural national identity which continued from ancient Greece through Byzantium.⁶ Byron might have had problems understanding fully either modern Greek or

Albanian, although he cultivated an interest in languages. He had studied classical authors, and besides professed to 'a smattering of modern Greek – the Armenian & Arabic Alphabets – a few Turkish & Albanian phrases, [...] Italian tolerably – Spanish less than tolerably – French to read with ease – but speak with difficulty'.⁷ Vikent Rakić's Serbo-Italian primer *Il Dialoghista Illirico-Italiano* (Venice, 1810) was in his library. During his travels in the East, he communicated with his guides in a wild pidgin of Greek, Italian and Latin.⁸ What Byron knew of Eastern songs and their culture he obtained to a large extent through fiction and historical sources, among them Paul Rycaut's late-seventeenth-century writings on Ottoman history, William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Barthélemy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697), or Demetrius Cantemir's standard work, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire* (English edition 1734).⁹ From the late eighteenth century onwards, heroic stories from the East with fatal love interest, combat and betrayal were available to Western readers in translation.

A vogue for oral poetry from Serbia and Greece had gripped Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The earliest Balkan source of note to reach the Western public was Andrija Kačić Miošić's *Razgovor Ugodni Naroda Slovinskoga*, or *The Pleasant Conversation of the Slavic People* (1756, enlarged edn 1759), a chronicle of the South Slavs which also included folk poetry. The latter often resulted from Kačić Miošić's own clever compositions in the Serbian oral tradition; ignorant of this circumstance, translators and poets generally accepted the material as authentic. Works such as *Saggio d'Osservazioni sopra l'Isola di Cherso ed Osero* and *Viaggio in Dalmazia* by Alberto Fortis (1771, 1774, English translation 1778), Clemens Werthes's *Die Sitten der Morlacken aus dem Italienischen übersetzt* (1775) and Herder's *Stimmen der Völker* (1778–79) drew upon it.¹⁰ Traditional Serbian repertoire such as the celebrated 'Dirge of the Wife of Asan Aga' survives in versions by, among others, Herder, Goethe, and Walter Scott. From the eighteenth century, the performance of such oral repertoire was described in Western accounts.¹¹ Vuk Karadžić, a scholar greatly appreciated by Jacob Grimm and Leopold von Ranke, published his collection of Serbian folksongs in Vienna in 1814. Much extended in subsequent editions, it circulated in translation throughout Western Europe. Claude Charles Fauriel's *Chants populaires de la Grèce* became a great success in 1824 and was translated into English and German one year later. In 1827 Goethe published his experiments with Greek songs, *Neugriechisch-epirotische Heldenlieder* and *Neugriechische Liebe-Skolien*, together with his translation of a passage from Byron's *Don Juan*.

Singers are, as field studies in the Balkans have shown, not automatic reproducers and transmitters of a canonic text. The length of a song may differ considerably from one performance to the next. If performers claim to recite a story exactly as they have heard it, they mean the plot. As Albert Lord once put it, 'for the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance'.¹² Once a singer's tale has been recorded in print, the moment of composition is, as it were, frozen in time. A song can, however, continue in an animated performance on paper, as the example of *The Giaour* may show.

It has long been observed that *The Giaour* rehearses conventions of oral poetry. It celebrates the living voice: more than a third of its lines are delivered in direct speech. *The Giaour* contains ten references to breathing. The tale's first line, 'No breath of air to break the wave', coming at a point when a storyteller would normally take a breath before diving into the narrative, provides an appropriately suffocating overture, given that the subsequent passages talk about a country which is 'living Greece no more' (l. 91). *The Giaour* offers layers of conversation and communication. In the manner of a 'clever raconteur'¹³, Byron comments on the tale as translator and editor, while the main text itself is composed of several voices. Robert Gleckner beautifully compares the work to a sculpture: we will only arrive at a fuller picture once we have walked around it, taking in its varied shapes and shadows from all sides. Gleckner distinguishes between two narrators of the tale: a poet-traveller (not necessarily Byron), who takes a larger view of present-day Greece and the human condition in general; and an anonymous singer who tells the story of the Venetian infidel and his unfortunate lover, a story in which he himself sometimes is a partisan participant.¹⁴ Through this singer, other characters either speak or think – among them Hassan and his mother, a monk, a Tartar, and a fisherman who saw how Leila was drowned.¹⁵ At the end of the tale, the Giaour himself indulges in an inordinately long dying speech which makes the most of its one-man audience, a friar.¹⁶ The singer, Jerome McGann argues, avails himself of a technique used since Homer: he assumes as many roles as he needs, and enters into the psychology of his characters in a virtuoso performance.¹⁷ An exemplary moment occurs when Hassan's mother waits for her son to return with his new bride. By that time, as the reader knows, Hassan lies dead in the mountains:

The browsing camels' bells are tinkling –
His Mother looked from her lattice high,
She saw the dews of eve besprinkling
The pasture green beneath her eye,

She saw the planets faintly twinkling,
 'Tis twilight – sure his train is nigh.' –
 She could not rest [...],
 But gazed [...] –
 'Why comes he not?' (ll. 689–97)

Byron draws upon a number of features known in oral poetry; for instance, repetitions ('she saw' – 'she saw') and formulae (Hassan is often called 'stern Hassan'). Such devices were familiar to contemporary readers of Ossian and English ballads.¹⁸ In this particular passage, the singer creates a sense of drama by direct speech and questions. Spoken aloud, the lines evoke not only the elusive sounds of distant bells in the oriental evening ('tinkling', 'sprinkling', 'twinkling'), they also give acoustic colour to the twilight of the sunset and the mother's vaccillating state of mind. In a synaesthetic performance, the lines combine sounds, light, and moods. They develop their fullest impact in oral recitation and no doubt made a powerful impression at a time when poems were often read aloud to an audience.¹⁹

With *The Giaour*, the tale's origins are obscured in a maze of sources and authoritative voices. Byron pretends to suffer from a flawed recollection: 'I regret that my memory has retained so few fragments of the original', he playfully notes at the end of his piece.²⁰ Yet he kept adding new material to the tale. '*The Giaour* was no sooner issued than bought up,' one reviewer groaned in late 1813, 'edition trod upon the heels of edition; and before we had time to determine whether we ought to review it, the fifth with large *additions* (we wish we could add *subtractions*) is laid upon our table.'²¹ 'Were his readers to assume, as each new and augmented edition of his 'snake of a poem' came out, that he periodically recalled additional snatches of the original lay?', McGann remarks about the strange workings of Byron's memory.²² Did Byron's readership believe in an 'original lay'? Credulous critics thought Byron owed his story to an unforgettable oral performance ('a recollection of the scene in which he first heard it, of the impression which it made on an eastern audience, and of the grotesque declamation and gestures of the Turkish story-teller').²³ 'The Turkish original of the tale,' another wrote, 'is attested [...] by the great variety of untranslated words which perplex the unlearned reader.'²⁴ Readers were even instructed how to pronounce the title of the work.²⁵ Byron's orientalism was also an acoustic experience, to be savoured in loud reading. The sounds of *The Giaour* in performance made it into literature, as in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818):

having [...] gone through a brief comparison of opinion as to the

first-rate poets, trying to ascertain whether *Marmion* or *The Lady of the Lake* were to be preferred, and how ranked the *Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*; and moreover, how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced, he shewed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of the one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other; he repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry.²⁶

Melancholy Captain Benwick, the 'performer' in question, plunges so passionately into his declamation of *The Giaour* that his friend Anne Elliot recommends a larger allowance of prose in his daily study.

When it first appeared in print between 1813 and 1815, *The Giaour* had all the trappings of a scrupulously edited popular song, rendered all the more credible by its foreign words and 'fragmentary' nature.²⁷ In best antiquarian manner, Byron supplied lacunae where text was supposedly missing. Learned footnotes (turned to endnotes in the seventh edition) and a line count (from the third edition) complemented the editorial fiction.²⁸ Byron cared about layout – he even instructed his publisher Murray on minutiae such as asterisks.²⁹ As an audible work of art, and as a piece of print, with its verbal as well as non-verbal text, *The Giaour* conveyed the illusion of authenticity.

Byron's commentary to *The Giaour* sounds facetious at times – for instance, when he describes the Muslim bridge to the netherworld, 'of breadth less than the thread of a famished spider, over which the Mussulmans must skate into Paradise' (note to l. 483). Such remarks undermine the apparent seriousness of the main text. Quite possibly attentive early readers realized that they were in for a joke. *The Giaour* has long been recognized as a swipe at Robert Southey's metrical romance *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), in which orientalist subject matter was heavily glossed by long-winded, ponderous annotations.³⁰ In book eight of *Thalaba*, the gleaming fiend Oneiza emerges from her tomb, but her 'vampire corpse' is dispatched by a timely lance before it can inflict more harm on the hero and the discerning reader. A nineteen-page (!) footnote glosses her exit with lurid ethnographic detail.³¹ Duly following his model, Byron not only includes a vampire scene in *The Giaour* but, like Southey, explanatory notes. These acknowledge 'the notes on *Thalaba*' as a source ('the stories told in Hungary and Greece of these foul feeders are singular, and some of them most incredibly attested').³²

Byron's oriental fantasy is, however, not to be understood as a response to merely one individual work since it follows other literary projects of the period which cultivated personalized idiosyncratic notes. *The Giaour* appeared in the shadows of another of Byron's annotated poetical compositions, the wildly successful *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a collage of autobiography, travelogue, lyrical setting and antiquarian interest. Characteristically, Murray placed advertisements of *Childe Harold* in issues of *The Giaour* which stressed the hybrid nature of the work:

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt: written during the Author's Travels in Portugal, Spain, Albania, and some of the most interesting Parts of Greece; with Notes. To which are added, a few miscellaneous Poems, and Translations of modern Greek Songs, written chiefly abroad: and a short Appendix, containing Observations on modern Greek Literature, with a short Catalogue of Romaic Authors.³³

Byron's Eastern tales mimic a genre of the period which might be defined as 'antiquarian verse narrative'. Here, a text rehearses historical occurrences, legends, folktales and the like, and supplements them with a substantial commentary. Many early readers shelved *The Giaour* in this category, as can be inferred from contemporary anthologies. Byron's tales were initially sold as octavos in unassuming drab wrappers. Often, however, buyers had them bound with other 'related' works, such as the verse narratives *The Battles of Talavera* by J.W. Croker, W. Drennan's *Glendalloch*, and *The Legend of Cathleen and Kevin*, a work of 'poetical' as much as 'antiquarian' merit (*The Legend of Cathleen and Kevin* boasted foot- and endnotes).³⁴ In this hybrid genre, verse and circumstantial information were equally important. Notes proved indispensable for the understanding of the past-in-poetry. As Byron's contemporary Goethe observed, 'the reader who on dear old ancients dotes, knows that he needs good glosses, and wants notes. The moderns seem far easier, far straighter. Yet they too need a talented translator.'³⁵ This also applied to an antiquarian spoof such as *The Giaour*. Early foreign-language versions of the tale included not only Byron's verses but his notes.³⁶ Byron was very keen on having his notes reviewed, and, as editions went by, alerted his reviewers to changes in the margins.³⁷ As the distancing explanatory device of a 'talented translator' (to use Goethe's term), Byron's commentary to *The Giaour* supplies sane, funny prose. It works as an anti-dote on doting readers who are, like poor Captain Benwick, carried away by the immediacy of seemingly straight oral poetry. Unfortunately, these notes have been pruned from certain current editions or banned to the editorial apparatus as if they were an irrelevant paratext.³⁸ A whole communicative

dimension of Byron's oeuvre is thereby lost to many modern readers.

Antiquarian-poets in Byron's days navigated between critical editing and free composition, enjoying the licence to change, digress, or reduce. As in oral repertoire (which often provided their subject matter), their creativity was not restricted by the notion of a finite text. According to an early critic of *The Giaour*, Byron had 'not confined himself, either to the incidents, or to the catastrophe, of the original tale; but has given full scope to his own fertile imagination'.³⁹ Indeed one admirer applauded Byron's licentious editing: by omitting 'the many insipid ingredients which swelled the redundant narratives of our ancestors', Byron had managed to 'reduce' his composition 'to its quintessence'.⁴⁰ Fragments were reader-friendly, another critic argued, as 'the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic, than to a whole ox'.⁴¹ Apparently, readers did not worry whether *The Giaour* adequately represented an 'original lay'. (If they wanted original lays, they could always recur to the appendix of *Childe Harold*, where Byron cited actual Greek poems instead of faking them in an amusing pastiche.)

If Byron was free to dwell on essentials, he was also at liberty to add according to personal taste and the wishes of his readers. His friend and critic Francis Hodgson made the author alter the last lines of *The Giaour*:

The last lines Hodgson likes – & it is not often he does – & when he don't [sic] – he tells me with great energy – & then I fret & alter – I have thrown them in to soften the ferocity of our Infidel – & for a dying man have given him a good deal to say for himself-.⁴²

In May 1813, the poet lived a few minutes' walk from his publisher's offices in Albemarle Street, London, and frequently dropped by to implement changes.⁴³ 'Dear Sir,' Byron wrote to Murray in summer 1813, 'can you keep the proofs standing a day for the G[iaour]? if so – I will send you a few more lines –'.⁴⁴ As Byron's working routine for *The Giaour* attests, printing was part of the writing process, and writing in turn drew upon audience feedback.⁴⁵ In lengthening the rattles of his tale, the editor Byron claims the privileges of the singer Byron. Always a compulsive reviser of his own work, Byron acts as any good performer would: he extends and digresses with verses – and notes – to prolong the pleasure of his appreciative audience. Over 12,000 copies of *The Giaour* in the first thirteen editions⁴⁶ show that readers – or listeners – impatiently demanded an encore.

THE CURSE

Like telling a story, cursing is an oral performance which thrives upon an audience. It is an excellent dramatic device, as in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, where Richard mocks yet fears Queen Margaret's powerful curses. A haunting speech, still missing in the first fair manuscript copy of *The Giaour*, appeared in a first printed edition which had been struck off for private circulation. Here, Byron was, in the opinion of a contemporary critic, 'banquetting [...] to surfeit on the imagined terrors of the grave'. With 'the strange and sickening superstition of the Vampyre', Byron had chosen 'a subject totally unfit for the poetical canvass'.⁴⁷ The infamous lines occur when the Giaour has killed Hassan in combat and is cursed in return (ll. 747–86). Although they address the Giaour in the second person, they are not delivered in direct speech (quotation marks sign-posted every line of direct speech in the 1813–15 editions). They voice most likely the singer's mood, who at this point allows himself to be drawn into the story:

But first, on earth as Vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race,
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse [...]. (ll. 755–62)

May the Giaour live forever and feed upon his kind? As Peter Thorslev observes, this 'Mohammedan curse' invests the hero with wife and daughter 'when so far as the poem shows, he has neither' (p. 9). The hammed-up speech pokes fun at the antiquarian horror of *Thalaba the Destroyer*. Byron's vampires instil fear by exquisite bad taste, as other satirical poems dating back to the composition of *The Giaour* show.⁴⁸

Within the tale, the vampire curse is traditionally seen as an expression of religious antagonism, a 'Mohammedan' invective against the Christian enemy.⁴⁹ Attempts to uncover the religious politics of *The Giaour* have not been lacking. Marilyn Butler regards the work as an allegory on the British Empire: written in the year Parliament endorsed missionary work in India, *The Giaour* questions empire-building by religion. In Butler's account, the narrative is dominated by the representatives of two 'imperial' religions: Islam and proselytising Christianity. Christian European powers intended to "liberate" their Greek co-religionists from the Turks', a project which

Byron's tale unmask as the exchange of 'one alien despotism for another'.⁵⁰ Byron's tale begins with a historical 'Advertisement'. It alludes to the 1770s, when Turks, Greeks, Albanians, Venetians and Russians violently fought over territory, with changing coalitions and uncertain results. Russia had encouraged a Greek revolt, but with many Greeks failing to fight and insufficient Russian reinforcements, the initiative foundered in horrible massacres.⁵¹ In the Balkans and the Levant of the eighteenth century, theological frontlines had evolved along military and cultural ones. Kačić Miošić's collection of pseudo-oral poetry was composed in a Franciscan convent and dedicated to the Bishop of Korčula. The second edition of *Razgovor* (1759) was offered to a local prince whose family was praised for its long history of fighting against the 'Ottoman barbars'. Kačić Miošić expressed the hope that his heroic stories and songs would foster resilience against Muslim dominance. Significantly, his work was approved by the Inquisitor of the Holy Office in Venice, who found 'nothing against the holy Catholic faith' in it, and was recommended for circulation in the public libraries of Venice and Padua.⁵²

While Butler's argument for religion as a political tool is substantiated by the way ideological and territorial war zones were mapped out in the East of the eighteenth century, a unified, anti-Ottoman Christian liberation movement did not exist. As early as the seventeenth century, Paul Rycaut's authoritative book *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (1679) – a work Byron might have read – devotes a full chapter to the struggle between Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim forces for religious influence in the Greek Archipelago; all sides are uncharitably portrayed as exploiting local communities.⁵³ Christian groups contended among each other for influence in the lands of the Ottoman Empire. The Greek Orthodox community was co-ordinated by the Phanariots, a Greek upper class of Constantinople residents who provided the Patriarch. Having made very comfortable arrangements with Ottoman authorities, they had no intention of collaborating with their so-called Christian co-religionists. The Orthodox church itself was split between the Phanariot régime, campaigns for local independence, a reform movement orchestrated by Austria, and a pan-Slavic initiative masterminded by Russia.⁵⁴ Russia had long projected the restoration of a Byzantine Empire, ruled under Russian guidance from an Orthodox Constantinople. In preparation, Catherine the Great had her aptly named grandson Constantine tutored in Greek and groomed for the office of Byzantine Emperor. Relations with the Catholic church were cool. The Patriarch of Constantinople regularly anathematized the Pope, for instance, in 1722, for wearing shoes embroidered with a cross.⁵⁵ Excommunication was a

preferred instrument used by Church authorities to enforce civic obedience. At the outbreak of the Greek revolt in 1821, Patriarch Gregorios of Constantinople solemnly excommunicated all rebels and called upon his subjects to return to the Ottoman fold (nonetheless the Sublime Porte had him hanged for treason).⁵⁶ Anathema as a Greek feature was discussed by historians and travellers, such as Byron's source Tournefort. It became a literary trope, for instance, in Shelley's lyrical drama *Hellas* (1821) and Prosper Mérimée's spoof collection *La Guzla* (1827).⁵⁷ The Greek fear of damnation still represents a powerful political weapon – as late as 2004, Bishop Pavlos of Kyrenia warned his flock that they would be damned if they approved the UN plan for the reunification of Cyprus.⁵⁸ In this historical context, it seems worthwhile to investigate cursing as an element of religious contest buttressed by official authority.

Greek Orthodox anathema – a ban from the religious community which, in its most severe form, means the damnation of the person affected – had a powerful social dimension. It could be pronounced not only on individuals but a group. During the Ottoman period entire villages could be cursed by decree, for instance, to ensure that cattle thieves were denounced to the authorities. Until modern times, the ceremony was performed in public with black vestments, candles, troparia about Judas, and formal speeches; it was even possible to curse the dead.⁵⁹ The sentence was a collective act: the community of the faithful confirmed the verdict by shouting 'Amen' or (in the Latin rite) 'fiat'. The ceremony might include elements of the service for the dying or defunct – in this manner, the victim was, effectively, turned into a dead person.⁶⁰ While Latin rites proclaimed the living as dead, the dead were almost alive in Greek Orthodox ones. The Eastern church promoted the view that the bodies of the damned would not decay.⁶¹ (Damned were, preferably, members of other faiths such as the Catholics.⁶²) The idea of incorruptible material evil was founded upon a particular interpretation of the gospel of Mark and Matthew, which in turn derived from Isaiah 66.24:

And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.⁶³

This special feature of Greek Orthodox doctrine was well-known in the West as early as the seventeenth century. *The Present State* discussed it at length and even included an excommunication formula in the original Greek. In Rycaut's translation, the sentence has not lost its flavour, pronouncing everlasting corporeality in awesome detail:

let him be separated from the Lord God Creatour, and be accursed, and unpardoned, and undissolvable after death in this World, and in the other which is to come. Let Wood, Stones, and Iron be dissolved, but not they: May they inherit the Leprosie of *Gehazi*, and the Confusion of *Judas*; may the Earth be divided, and devour them like *Dathan* and *Abiram*; may they sigh and tremble on earth like *Cain*, [...] may they have the Curses of the holy and righteous Patriarchs *Abram*, *Isaac* and *Jacob*; of the 318 Saints who were the Divine Fathers of the Synod of Nice; and of all other holy Synods; and being without the Church of Christ, let no man administer unto them the things of the Church, or bless them, or offer Sacrifice for them, [...] or eat, or drink, or work with them, or converse with them; and after death, let no man bury them, in penalty of being under the same state of Excommunication [...].⁶⁴

Rycaut regales his readers with bizarre Greek tales about halted and accelerated corruption as a consequence of the curse. Thus, an unfortunate villager from the Morea had died under excommunication. Suspected of having turned into a vampire, he was dug up again; the body was found suspiciously intact, boiled in wine, and laid out in the local church. The community beseeched the Patriarch of Constantinople to lift the ban on the defunct. Finally a merciful letter arrived. As soon as the pardon was pronounced, the coffin rumbled and the body instantly dissolved as if it had lain interred for seven years! Unimpressed by the story, Rycaut concluded that the Orthodox church encouraged superstition to rake in money for their impoverished clergy.⁶⁵ The idea of a demonic body conflicted with the Christian notion of saintly incorruptibility. It became a symbol of religious difference within Christianity. In his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1789), Voltaire traced the origins of vampire legends in a schismatic modern Greece, where Orthodox Greeks regarded Roman Catholics as excommunicated sinners whose bodies would not decay.⁶⁶

To return to *The Giaour*. Its genesis leads us to faiths in conflict as much as to battling nationalities. Indeed the title of the tale is pure damnation. 'Giaour' means 'infidel', somebody excluded from a religious community. In oral practice, the name becomes an apostrophe of exclusion: 'giaour Izmir', for instance, means 'infidel Izmir' – a curse on a Turkish coastal city with a large population of non-Muslim foreigners.⁶⁷ Byron's 'Romaic' or 'Arnaut' ditty can, we remember, be understood in both ethnic and religious terms. From his enemy's 'Arnaut garb' Hassan does not guess that the Giaour has chosen the Albanian nationality but that he is 'apostate from his own vile faith' (ll. 615–16). Interestingly, Hassan's religious

credentials too emerge from what he wears. He is identified as 'an Emir by his garb of green' (l. 357). The garment not only signposts him as a Turk; its colour was traditionally reserved to old families who traced their lineage back to Mohammed, as Byron's note to that line points out.⁶⁸ The vampire curse is framed by passages expressing religious antagonism. First, the singer evokes with loud prayer ('Alla Hu!') a Muslim paradise where celestial maids 'welcome with a kiss the brave! | Who falls in battle 'gainst a Giaour' (ll. 734, 744–5). What follows is not a 'Mohammedan curse', *pace* Thorslev, but an invocation which mingles Greek Orthodox doctrine with an Islamic vision of hell (Byron even adds a pun on 'orthodox' in his notes on the curse).⁶⁹ The curse is truly the speech-act of a ditty both 'Romaic' and 'Arnaut'.

The Giaour's religious orientation appears even more confusing than that of the harangue visited upon him – one of the reasons why contemporary reviewers complained that Byron was 'too negligent [...] in his productions of [...] Christian principles'.⁷⁰ Why the Giaour, an apostate of Venetian origins, would spend his last days in what appears to be, of all places, a Catholic convent remains a mystery. He is called a 'lone Caloyer', and indeed in his long-haired appearance he resembles a type of un-groomed Greek monk.⁷¹ His dying speech (ll. 971–1328) has variously been regarded as an example of Calvinist introspection or confession, but it also mentions Allah (l. 1133).⁷² As if excommunicated and damned, he predicts that he will turn into 'that lifeless thing the living fear'; furthermore, he shuns common meals and conversation, and compares himself to Cain (ll. 1280, 1058). He does not mind a cross on his grave (l. 1325) but refuses the sacraments (this part, much extended in the seventh edition, disturbed Adam Mickiewicz so much that he expurgated it in his 1834 translation).⁷³

Byron looked coldly upon the business of religion. 'I abhor Religion, though I reverence & love my God,' he noted in 1807.⁷⁴ In a draft of his Catholic emancipation speeches in 1812/13, he mentioned the ruinous dispute between the Latin and Greek churches during the siege of Constantinople, which contributed to the fall of the city.⁷⁵ A few years later, he wrote, 'when I was in Turkey I was oftener tempted to turn Mussulman than poet, & have often regretted since that I did not'.⁷⁶ The religions displayed in *The Giaour* are, as Butler has so convincingly argued, interchangeable in their ruthless quest for domination. Given the various Muslim and Christian (in particular, Greek-Orthodox) elements in the text, the issue is not a struggle between Christendom and Islam but the devastating effect religions of whatsoever colour may have on a community. The main protagonist's convictions remain uncertain: he finds rest


neither in 'Arnaut garb' nor in the convent. Faith offers cold comfort. 'Blest' was the Giaour while Leila lived – now he cares not for the blessings of the church (ll. 1115, 1269). 'Blessed' are the Greek isles, but, like Leila, their 'deadly fair' beauty is 'hovering round decay' (ll. 8, 92, 99). As the poet-narrator laments in his dirge on Greece, 'Hers is the loveliness in death,|That parts not quite with parting breath' (ll. 94–5). A beautiful corpse on the brink of corruption, Greece has lost her voice. More vocal are the forces which brought about destruction, elbowing each other out of the narrative in *The Giaour*, cursing each other. 'Cursed' are those with selfish designs on beauty: 'the tyrants that destroy', murderous Hassan, whose desolate tomb is overgrown by weeds, and the Giaour, who walks the earth as a living dead.⁷⁷ With such champions, Greece may wait long for her resurrection.

* * *

Kačić Miošić once ruefully remarked about the folklore of his people that it lacked variety:

These songs will not be to everyone's taste, for there is little variation among them, all of them containing the same words, such as: *hero, knight, horseman, galley slave, serpent, dragon, wolf, lion, falcon, eagle, falcon's nest and sword, sabres, lances, Kraljević, Kobilić, Zdrinović, necklets, medallions, decrees, heads chopped off, slaves carried away, etc.* May those who find them pleasing sing them; may those who do not, go off to sleep.⁷⁸

Far from rehearsing monotonous tropes of the East, Byron's oriental inspiration galvanized its audience. Byron celebrated the singer's voice in the print medium. Animated by moveable type, *The Giaour* is truly told on a 'living page' (l. 126) which ever proliferates. The tale breathes as if it were an organism, gathering its forces for the next accretion. Byron playfully establishes a conversation between audience, editor-translator, narrators, sources, and the many voices within the tale. Most of the time these voices are locked into an inextricably hostile embrace, exemplifying the battleground Greece has become. In tune with historical circumstance, *The Giaour* evokes religions in contest, each destructive in a will to dominate, none winning in the end. Time-honoured story-telling tricks tease readers to lend their voices to this struggle, and turn verses about doomed passion and sensational superstition into spoken word again. But *The Giaour* encourages switching between two levels of enjoying the tale. While its poetry seduces us into emotional involvement, the notes are best savoured in silent reading. Their dry irony encourages detached reflection. Byron

chose an exceptional departure from the over-enthusiastic heroic mode adopted by so many contemporary neo-Hellenic poems (as Goethe criticized such works, 'strike him dead! Strike him dead! Bring the laurels! Blood! Blood! [...] That's no poetry yet').⁷⁹ Byron's editorial ruse establishes a balance between a passionate Hellenic vision in the poetry and an understanding that this vision may remain an unattainable ideal in the prose. Such subtlety lifts Byron's Eastern song more than a notch above Southey's purple orientalism. *The Giaour* refreshingly refrains from nationalism as it was sometimes flaunted in other collections of (pseudo)-oral poetry during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. A singer in the times of print culture, Byron used the printing press as an instrument to play a polyphonic score. It is high time to restore Byron the editor, translator and commentator to the concert of voices on his living page. 

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NOTES

1. *The Giaour*, in *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), III, p. 423, note to l. 1334. Peter Cochran's online edition signposts accretions of the tale in colour coding (http://212.158.3.83/pdf_files/turk_2.pdf at www.internationalbyronsociety.org). Thomas J. Wise, *A Bibliography of the Writings in Verse and Prose of George Gordon Noel, Baron Byron* (Folkestone: Dawson's, 1933/1972), pp. 74–85. F.L. Randolph, *Studies for a Byron Bibliography* (Lititz, Pa.: Sutter House, 1979), pp. 25–8.
2. *The Giaour*, commentary, p. 413. Byron to Murray, 26 August 1813. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie Marchand, 13 vols (London: Murray, 1973–94), III, p. 100. Hereafter LJ.
3. On sources, autobiographical and otherwise, see LJ, III, pp. 34–5, 124. *The Giaour*, commentary, pp. 414–15.
4. *The Giaour*, Byron's note to l. 1334.
5. I am grateful to William St Clair for pointing this out. There also were Catholic Greek and Christian Albanian minorities. As Naji Oueijan writes in 'Futile Encounters between East and West: Islam and Christianity in Byron's *The Giaour*', the East of Byron's time was not all Muslim, and the West not all Christian. In *Byron the Traveller*, ed. by Itsuyo Higashinaka *et al.* (Kyoto: Japanese Byron Society, 2003), 193–207.
6. Vasilios N. Makrides, 'Orthodoxy as *Conditio sine qua non*: Religion and State/Politics in Modern Greece from a Socio-Historical Perspective', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 40/4 (1991), 281–305. William St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
7. LJ, IX, p. 31, 1821.
8. *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 252, no. 168. *The Giaour*, Byron's commentary to l. 1077.
9. Harold S.L. Wiener, 'Byron and the East: Literary Sources of the "Turkish Tales"', in *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, ed. by Herbert Davis and others (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University

Press, 1940), pp. 89–129.

10. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Volkslieder, Übertragungen, Dichtungen*, in *Werke*, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 10 vols (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), III. Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. by Stephen Mitchell, Gregory Nagy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 135–6.

11. For instance, Alberto Fortis, *Travels into Dalmatia* (1778; facs. rpr. New York: Arno, 1971), pp. 82–5.

12. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, pp. 13, 101. See also Margaret H. Beissinger, *The Art of the Lăutar: The Epic Tradition of Romania* (New York: Garland, 1991). John Kolsti, *The Bilingual Singer: A Study in Albanian and Serbo-Croatian Oral Epic Traditions* (New York: Garland, 1990).

13. Jerome McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 148. I counted 502 lines of direct speech.

14. Robert F. Gleckner, *Byron and the Ruins of Paradise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967), pp. 97–8.

15. Gleckner thinks the fisherman is identical with the singer – I am not sure.

16. See note 72.

17. McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 145.

18. McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 146.

19. Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 9, provides a survey of Romantic reading practices.

20. *The Giaour*, note to l. 1334.

21. Probably J.W. Cunningham in *Christian Observer*, XII (Nov. 1813), in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, 9 vols (New York: Garland, 1972), B:II, p. 571.

22. McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 143.

23. George Ellis on *The Giaour*, 11th edn, *Quarterly Review*, X (January 1814), in Reiman, B:V, p. 2002.

24. Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XXI (July 1813), in Reiman, B:II, p. 847.

25. For instance, Thomas Denman in *Monthly Review* (June 1813), in Reiman, B:IV, p. 1740.

26. [Jane Austen], *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, 4 vols (London: Murray, 1818), III, p. 238.

27. As William Roberts admitted, the title 'A Fragment of a Turkish Tale' almost fooled him into believing in a translation of a genuine Turkish poem. *British Review*, V (Oct. 1813), in Reiman, B:I, p. 409.

28. The British Library holds a box set of the first ten editions, once owned by Thomas J. Wise (shelfmark Ashley 2626).

29. Byron's note on a rough draft in the Murray archives: 'Third paragraph of *The Giaour* continue with a separation – but no asterisks.' *The Giaour*, commentary, p. 407.

30. Robert Southey, *Thalaba the Destroyer*, 2 vols (London: for T.N. Longman, 1801). Peter Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 148, identifies *Thalaba* as a source.

31. Southey, *Thalaba*, II, book 8, pp. 103–21.

32. *The Giaour*, notes to ll. 755, 781.

33. Advertisement for the sixth edition of *Childe Harold*, appended to the fifth edition of *The Giaour*. Cambridge University Library, Syn.4.81.9(8).

34. Cambridge University Library, Hib.5.812.54. *The Legend of Cathleen and Kevin* is

sometimes ascribed to H.J.M. Mason. Author's unpaginated preface.

35. Anthony Grafton's fine verse translation from Goethe's collection *Sprichwörtlich*, in *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 28.

36. For instance, in a German version, *Der Gauer* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1819). The translator even mentioned which edition he had used (the seventh).

37. To Francis Hodgson: 'in the published copies there are additions to the amount of ten pages, text and margin (chiefly the last) [...]. If, therefore, you review it, let it be from the published copies and not from the first sketch.' 6 June 1813. *LJ*, III, p. 57. Byron's reviewers usually considered the annotations flippant and discordant with the main narrative. See *British Review* (Dec. 1813), in Reiman, B:I, p. 413; *Christian Observer* (Nov. 1813), in Reiman, B:II, p. 574; *Monthly Review* (June 1813), in Reiman, B:IV, p. 1743. *The Satirist* (July 1813) remained an exception in praising their 'very amusing slyness'. Reiman, B:V, p. 2133.

38. In the Oxford *Complete Poetical Works*, Byron's notes are tucked in between McGann's in the critical apparatus. *Selected Poetry of Lord Byron*, ed. by Leslie Marchand, intr. Thomas Disch (New York: Random House, 2001) includes *The Giaour* without Byron's notes. Byron's commentary appears as endnotes in *Lord Byron: Selected Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and *Lord Byron: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rev. 2000 edn), both ed. by J. McGann; and as footnotes in *Lord Byron: Selected Poems*, ed. by Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (London: Penguin, 1996).

39. *Antijacobin Review* (Aug. 1813), in Reiman, B:I, p. 31.

40. George Ellis, in 1814, in Reiman, B:V, p. 2001. See also Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of A Form* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 117.

41. Francis Jeffrey on *The Giaour*, in Reiman, B:II, p. 842.

42. To Murray, 26 August 1813. *LJ*, III, p. 100.

43. Byron lived in Bennet Street. Wise, p. 77.

44. *LJ*, III, p. 54. Probably June.

45. For William St Clair, printing was part of the writing process. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 10. My thanks to the author for letting me read the proofs of his book.

46. Wise, p. 78.

47. *Critical Review* (July 1813), in Reiman, B:II, p. 623.

48. Byron, *Complete Poetical Works*, III, pp. 86–7, no. 209. 'Windsor Poetics' [1813] envisages a ghoulish Prince Regent in whom the worst qualities of his ancestors have come to life again.

49. For instance, Thorslev, p. 9; Gleckner, p. 111; Marilyn Butler, 'Byron and the Empire in the East', in: *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 63–81, p. 74.

50. Butler, pp. 73, 75.

51. Advertisement, p. 40; commentary, p. 415.

52. Fra Andrija Kačić Miošić, *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga*, in *Djela Andrije Kačića Miošića*, ed. by T. Matić, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Hrvatska Akademija, 1942), 1759 edn, pp. 99, 100, 103. My translation.

53. Sir Paul Rycaut, *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (London: for John Starkey, 1679), ch. 19. Byron had read Rycaut's *Ottoman History* by the age of ten (*Miscellaneous Prose*, p. 220). We do not know whether he knew Rycaut's other works. It is likely, though: Byron devoured any oriental subject matter he could lay his hands on; in

subsequent years he studied Armenian language and culture; Rycaut was an international authority on the topic.

54. For a short history of the Orthodox Church in Ottoman territories, see Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, 1787–1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), ch. 1 and pp. 45–50. St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, ch. 1. Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Vintage, 1999), pp. 278–82. Makrides's patriotic piece passes over the fact that the Patriarchate, far from 'providing [...] material and symbolic leadership' (p. 285) condemned the Greek rebellion.

55. Goodwin, pp. 280, 293.

56. St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, pp. 3–4.

57. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas*, in *Shelley's Prose*, ed. by David Lee Clark (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), p. 333. Prosper Mérimée, *La Guzla, ou choix de poésies illyriques* (Paris: Levrault, 1827), pp. 31, 135, 177. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (Lyon: Bruyset, 1727), I, pp. 156, 164.

58. *The Guardian*, www.guardian.co.uk/cyprus/story/0,11551,1202188,00.html. Helena Smith in Nicosia, 24 April 2004.

59. *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by Hans Dieter Betz *et al.*, 5 vols (4 edn, Tübingen: Mohr, 1998–), II, p. 1822. For a definition of the various forms of excommunication and anathema, see Frans van de Paverd, 'Ausschluß und Wiederversöhnung in der byzantinischen Kirche', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 28/4 (1979), 281–302. Nikodim Milaš, *Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche*, tr. A. v. Pessić (2 edn, Mostar: Packer & Kisić, 1905), pp. 499–501. Demetrios Petrakakos, *Die Toten im Recht nach der Lehre und den Normen des orthodoxen morgenländischen Kirchenrechts und der Gesetzgebung Griechenlands* (Leipzig: Deichert/Böhme, 1905), pp. 113–15.

60. Hinrich Siuts, *Bann und Acht und ihre Grundlagen im Totenglauben* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1959), pp. 81–2.

61. Siuts cites a representative collection of Latin excommunication formulae (pp. 84–90). They stress the total annihilation of the victim's body.

62. As Mérimée joked, 'Les Grecs et les catholiques romains se damnent à qui mieux dans la Dalmatie et la Bosnie'; 'un Grec enterré dans un cimetière latin devient vampire, et vice versa'. *La Guzla*, pp. 31, 177.

63. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, ed. by R. Carroll, S. Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Also Matthew 5.29–30 and 18.8–9, Mark 9.48, and Colossians 3.5.

64. Rycaut, pp. 274–6. Rycaut was an international authority in the matter, referred to, among others, by J.M. Heineccius in *Eigentliche und wahrhafftige Abbildung der alten und neuen Griechischen Kirche* (Leipzig: Gleditsch, 1711), part III, pp. 418–19. See also *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. by Theodor Klauser *et al.* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1969). VII, column 1249, 'Fluch'.

65. Rycaut, pp. 279–82, 284.

66. Voltaire, 'vampires', in *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, 8 vols (enlarged edn, Amsterdam: Rey, 1789), VIII, p. 278. On the difference between Catholic and Greek Orthodox doctrine, see also Katharina M. Wilson, 'The History of the Word Vampire', pp. 3–11, and Juliette du Boulay, 'The Greek Vampire: A Study of Cyclic Symbolism in Marriage and Death', pp. 85–108; both in *The Vampire: A Casebook*, ed. by Alan Dundes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

67. I am grateful to William St Clair for this detail.

68. Oueijan and Beatty (see note 72) draw attention to the protagonists' garments.
69. 'But thou, false Infidel! shalt writhe | Beneath avenging Monkir's scythe; | And from its torment 'scape alone | To wander round lost Eblis' throne' (ll. 747–50). Byron glosses Eblis as 'the Oriental Prince of Darkness' and adds, 'Monkir and Nekir are the inquisitors of the dead, before whom the corpse undergoes a slight noviciate and preparatory training for damnation. If the answers are none of the clearest, he is hauled up with a scythe and thumped down with a red hot mace till properly seasoned, with a variety of subsidiary probations. The office of these angels is no sinecure; there are but two; and the number of *orthodox* deceased being in a small proportion to the remainder, their hands are always full.' Byron's notes to ll. 748, 750, emphasis mine.
70. *Town Talk* (Aug. 1813), in Reiman, B:V, p. 2300; an opinion shared by many other reviews in 1813.
71. *The Giaour*, ll. 787, 894. Tournefort described caloyers, some of whom were notorious for their dishevelled looks (vol. I, letter 3).
72. Bernard Beatty, 'Calvin in Islam: A Reading of *Lara* and *The Giaour*', *Romanticism*, 5.1 (1999), pp. 70–86; pp. 72, 75. With Peter Cochran I agree that the *Giaour* does not 'confess', given the observation of a fellow friar, 'Nor e'er before confession chair | Kneels he' (ll. 803–4).
73. For Mickiewicz, see Mirosława Modrzewska, 'Polish Romantic Translations of *The Giaour*', in *Byron: East and West*, ed. by Martin Procházka (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 2000), pp. 141–56, especially pp. 147–8. My thanks to Peter Cochran for this reference.
74. *Miscellaneous Prose*, p. 6.
75. *Miscellaneous Prose*, p. 30.
76. Gloss in his copy of D'Israeli's *The Literary Character* (1818). *Miscellaneous Prose*, p. 220.
77. *The Giaour*, ll. 67, 724. As David Roessel points out, the *Giaour*'s motifs with respect to Leila are just as selfish as Hassan's – so much for Greek liberation. In *Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in the English and American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 55. See also Caroline Franklin, *Byron's Heroines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. 2. On Greece as a (dead) woman, see St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, ch. 26.
78. 'Ove pisme svakomu drage ne će biti, jer među njima malo ima razlikosti, nahodeći se u svim istè riči, kakonoti ovè: junak, vitez, delija, leventa, zmija, zmaj, vuk, lav, sokò, ora, gnizdo sokolovo i mač, sablja, kopje, Kralević, Kobilić, Zdrinović, kolajne, medale, dukale, odsicaše, robje dovođaše &c. Kad bi moguće bilo, imala bi jedna od drugè biti posve različita, ali budući svi vitezovi imenovani od iste kriposti, s istim ričma služiti se bi potribito za ukazati njova junaštva. Komu su ugodne, neka ji piva; komu li nisu, neka ide spavati.' *Razgovor*, p. 613 [336]. Goodwin's good-humoured translation (p. vii).
79. 'Schlagt ihn todt! Schlagt ihn todt! Lorbern her! Blut! Blut! [...] das ist noch keine Poesie.' Conversation in December 1824. *Goethes Gespräche*, ed. by Woldemar Biedermann, 10 vols (Leipzig: Biedermann, 1889–96), V, p. 121. My thanks to Gerhard Lauer for this reference. I am indebted to Helga Ravelhofer and Bogomir Prunkl for translations of *Razgovor*; and to Anne Barton, Peter Cochran, Michael Wheeler and William St Clair for discussions on Romantic notes, cursing and confessing. All mistakes remain, of course, mine. Emma Rothschild and the Centre for History and Economics at King's College, Cambridge, very generously hosted me while I wrote this essay.